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THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English and French from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Violation of the right to self-determination of the Sahraoui people in Western Sahara

With great concern the Society for Threatened Peoples has observed the continuing standstill of efforts to reinstate the UN peace plan for Western Sahara. We share the concerns of the UN's Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who on several occasions in recent months has expressed his profound disappointment at the lack of satisfactory progress made in implementing the UN peace plan and has called for substantial new proposals from Morocco aimed at resolving the issues which are still outstanding. Full implementation of the UN peace plan offers the only guarantee of a lasting, just and peaceful solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. In spite of the renewal of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front no further progress has been achieved during the past year in preparing for the referendum on self-determination planned since 1991. By constantly raising new objections Morocco has sought to impede all efforts to organise the referendum. The dispute over electoral lists has shown the extent to which Morocco is unwilling to respect the Sahraoui people's right to self-determination. Through its irregular inclusion of tens of thousands of Moroccans in the electoral rolls and its deliberate encouragement of Moroccan immigration, Morocco is seeking to undermine the Sahraoui people's right to self-determination.

Unless Morocco abandons its policy of economic blockade, the collapse of the UN peace plan and a renewed outbreak of conflict between the Moroccan Army and the Polisario Front is likely. The international community should not be prepared to accept an escalation of violence in the Western Sahara without taking action. The Society for Threatened Peoples is appealing to the UN Human Rights Commission to urge the UN Security Council not to withdraw from conflict mediation in Western Sahara and to insist on implementation of the UN peace plan. The conclusive failure of the UN peace plan would not merely damage the reputation of the United Nations, it would constitute a serious reversal for the principle, enshrined in international law, of the right to self-determination.

The UN Commission on Human Rights should recommend to the UN Security Council that it instruct the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to proceed with concrete preparations for holding the referendum if Morocco does not abandon its policy of economic blockade. MINURSO should accordingly be given immediate instructions to complete arrangements for appeals by people excluded from the electoral register for the referendum as rapidly as possible. To that end additional qualified staff should be placed at MINURSO's disposal.